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Why They Don't Condemn Hamas

The failure to condemn Hamas stretches from universities and unions to the United Nations, which has denounced Israel many times since October 7 but the Palestinian terrorist group, zero.

By Kathleen Hayes

Published November 29, 2023

You can see the outraged dignity on their faces. Of course I oppose the slaughter of babies, they snap, implicitly demanding: What do you think I am, a monster? Insulted and aggrieved, convinced they've been tarred with a vicious slander, they retreat to their "pro-Palestinian" campus groups and social media feeds and glorious fall Saturday demonstrations, where all good people understand the righteousness of their cause.

Having once been such a "pro-Palestinian" activist myself, I'm sure that, in most cases, the sincerity is genuine. They do think the beheading of babies is wrong. They can examine their consciences and confidently say they oppose the atrocities Hamas committed on October 7.

And yet they don't. Say it. The failure to condemn Hamas stretches from universities and unions to the United Nations, which has denounced Israel many times since October 7 but the Palestinian terrorist group, zero. The luminaries behind these organizations want us to know they oppose the massacre of Israeli civilians; and because they are human beings not monsters, they undoubtedly do. It just doesn't seem to inspire any kind of passion.

My interest here is the mental sleight of hand that enables decent, avowedly progressive and other people to disregard the screaming signs that antisemitism is on the rampage. I'm not going to address the growing number who don't present as "good people": the mob in Sydney chanting, "Gas the Jews!", the guy displaying a swastika at a demonstration in Times Square the day after the pogrom, the woman at a London train station screaming, "Kill all the Jews!" These people are, thankfully perhaps, beyond my understanding. I also have a hard time understanding the mindset of someone who takes down posters of Hamas hostages; I can't see this as anything but evil. But I do have a bead on how people — I'll even call them good-hearted people — can see the above things happening and still think the righteous place to be is on the side of Hamas.

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"Not the side of Hamas — I'm on the side of the Palestinian people," they'll say, and again they'll believe it. I did. It requires an awesome surgical maneuver, a splicing between the righteous beliefs you proclaim and the more visceral, uglier ones you deny. In my case it involved a lot of Marxist verbiage about critical support, supportable versus unsupportable military action, imperialism versus neocolonial people, all in the service of liberating humanity from its misery.

I considered this way of thinking nuanced, dialectical. What it actually did is encourage a particularly *un*dialectical binary of oppressed versus oppressor, in which the oppressors are always completely guilty and the oppressed entirely innocent. Whatever merit exists in the idea that there are oppressors and oppressed in the world — and I think there is — this rigid, take-no-prisoners interpretation opened the door to cheering any number of horrors.

Of course the Palestinian people are not the same thing as Hamas. The Palestinians are a much-suffering people, including, particularly, at the hands of Hamas. And yet Hamas are Palestinians. They are the elected leadership of Gaza, acting in the name of the Palestinian cause, being hailed by many Palestinians and people who say they support the Palestinians. When a massive pogrom carried out by Palestinians is greeted with the worldwide cry, "Glory to the Palestinian resistance!" it's impossible not to read this as enthusiasm and yearning for more Jewish carnage.

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And yet this stench of bloodlust is denied by the schoolteachers and diversity specialists in their sustainable cotton t-shirts who march with children in tow against what they know is Israel's genocide of the Palestinians. I believe they really don't, for the most part, smell it. The suburban mom might be startled when she first spots a swastika twinned with the Star of David, but her discomfort fades after she sees another five, or 20. Apparently that's just how it is here. The contingent of keffiyeh-clad protestors chanting, "Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas!" is definitely disturbing, but she quickly ushers her children away. It's such a fine sunny day, and spirits are high. All these people have shown up, some driving great distances, to show their opposition to the ethnic cleansing of Gaza. She decides not to give too much weight to the few misfits (as she thinks) blighting the

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exhilarating. What hope exists in this show of solidarity with the suffering, what pleasure in joining so many others in pointing the accusatory righteous finger. It never occurs to her that the entire demonstration — from the liberal arts students with their drums and "Free Palestine" placards to the smiling grandparents in the "Jewish Voice for Peace" contingent to those troubling chanting keffiyah-wearers — has the same stink.

Marx once remarked that "the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living." Few traditions have been more enduring than antisemitism, which Marx inherited, along with nobler, rational and emancipatory principles, from the Enlightenment *philosophes* who inspired him. Thus the peculiar tradition of leftwing antisemitism was born and continues among people who have probably never read Marx and cheerfully concede that communism is dead.

These people certainly include antisemitism among the many isms they oppose. They don't consider it very important these days, but they cry watching "Schindler's List." They can't believe people once did such terrible things to helpless Jews, but they know that if they'd been in Germany at the time, they'd have fought the Nazis — after all, here they are today, marching against injustice. That it's Jews they're now marching against strikes them only as a bitter irony of history: Yesterday's victims have become today's oppressors. The Jews take their accustomed place as villains in a switch that just feels right somehow. The Manichean view that divides the world deftly between virtuous victims and villainous oppressors is so absolute that no mere fact can shake it — not even when that fact is a massacre livestreamed to the world, or your fellow demonstrators howling to put Jews in ovens.

A few days ago, Piers Morgan posed the demand to condemn Hamas to Jeremy Corbyn, former leader of the British Labour Party — a man, I'm sorry to say, I once admired to the point of joining Labour for the specific purpose of supporting him. I now follow Corbyn's doings with the sickened fascination of an ex-lover. The exchange with Morgan is spellbinding.

Morgan: No, it's *the* question.
Corbyn: Are you done yet?
Morgan: Should [Hamas] stay in power?
Corbyn: Are you done yet?
Morgan: This country says they're a terror group. Do you agree, and should they stay in power?
Corbyn: Listen. I do not approve, support or welcome Hamas…
Morgan: Are they a terror group?
Corbyn: Everybody knows what they are.
Morgan: Are they a terror group?

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the need for a ceasefire and Israel's culpability—but Morgan will have none of it. Again and again — no fewer than 15 times — he asks the question, "Are they a terror group?" Corbyn pleads: "Can we have a rational discussion?" Morgan repeats: "Are they a terror group?" Corbyn is enraged. "Can we have a rational discussion?!" he snaps. "Piers! Is it possible?! Come on! You answer it!" Eyes blazing behind their spectacles, lips clenched within his gray goatee, he leans back crossing his arms, radiating martyrdom.

In the interview, Corbyn does condemn the atrocities of October 7. At least there's that. Yet somehow — hate the sin, not the sinner — he can't bring himself to be too hard on the men who burned people alive and raped corpses. A champion of the oppressed doesn't betray them to the enemy, no matter what they do.

I wish I didn't understand this, but I do. I'm sure that when Corbyn crawled off Morgan's show, he was surrounded by comrades, friends, family and admirers, all of whom fervently believe he acted in the name of peace and justice. They commiserate over wine, share some good news about "pro-Palestinian" marches that day, joke at Morgan's expense. The sense of solidarity they share is even more sublime because of the attacks poor Jeremy endured. They love him, and as their love grows, so does their hatred of his enemies.

In the days since October 7, some years after I renounced my former views and became a Zionist, I sometimes join my fellow Jews in howling my astonishment. How can so many seemingly good people — people whose world I inhabited for so many years—not see the spiraling antisemitism all around them? Or are they truly antisemites themselves? How can so many people hate the Jews so much they want them exterminated, fewer than fourscore years after the Holocaust? Why? How can they continue to insist they're on the right side when their side is acting exactly like the Nazis? How can this be happening?

Then I remember how it felt, that transcendent sense of comradeship and purpose. It really is about feelings much more than beliefs. I had beliefs — I certainly believed I was fighting for a better world— but mostly the attraction in marching against Israel was emotional. Perverse as it sounds, the beating heart of it all was love, my love for my comrades — with hate being the inevitable corollary. And above all this meant hatred of "Zionists."

It's incredibly hard to fight people's feelings when those feelings are everything they live for. In a Godless world, the feelings people develop for their chosen family — from admired politicians to media to campus groups to every other fixture in our evermore alienated society — may well be all that gives them their sense of identity,

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consider themselves good is so very hard to break. They have to see the hideous side of the tribe that gives them their place in the world and, inevitably, be banished from it.

And now I need a final paragraph, preferably one allowing me to end on a note of hope. When I was a Trotskyist writing for my group's newspaper, the final paragraph was always the need for a party to lead the fight for socialist revolution. Sometimes I miss the simplicity of those days, those sure answers. Few things are clear to me now except that it's necessary to fight this war on the Jewish people; and successes must be possible or I wouldn't be here. So fight on we must. One heart and mind at a time.

Kathleen Hayes is the author of "Antisemitism and the Left: A Memoir."

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